Possessing the secret of joy...>>

Shug®

Volume I Issue II

July/August 2002

Woman's voice. Woman's experience.

Mission

Voice.
It's something mysterious about women and voice, how a silent photograph speaks, how language can make the feet move. The mission of Shug is very simple. It is to allow the voice of women to be personified in three different ways:

*Visual Art (photography,drawing,painting)
*Literature (short stories, poetry)
*Articles (social commentary, human interest, global perspective, personal experience)

Visual Arts: *A picture is worth a thousand words*

The vagueness of scent or the sunset can be captured only in our memory. The beauty of visual art lies in its ability to express without words. The visuals in Shug are a woman's view of the world. A woman's view of what is beautiful inside and outside herself. Herstory. Medusa's eyes on the world.

Literature: *They can burn my body, but never my spirit*

Literature has proven to be a catapult in the fruit of resistance. The power of song is the power of movement. Shug's literary compilation reflects an honesty that bites, an irreplaceable spirit, and undisguised reflection of the world. In the tradition of growth, it will plant seeds.

Art-icles: *Talking all that jive*

Shug rejects the contemporary view of women and denounces the outrageously caricatured faces of women plastered on the ends of shoelaces, and other places in which light can be hidden. The Art-icles in Shug are engaged in battle with the constant defacement of women and the myths professed about women. Each issue will explore local, national, or international political happenings.

testament:
the day convinced me to be

come child, when the wind comes in
come child, in the summer sweet
come rest in the easy of me

Dear children,
The stone has not allowed me to name nor call you to my side. i long to know that i did not send you from this place in a casket or in pieces. i hope that you are with your grandmothers. i hope that you are not a cursed child in the Congo or the ghettos of America, displaced. I have lied with the promises a soft womb affords. God, how do you place flowers at the graves inside of you?

On occasion, when our men have left us and our children are running around with their cousins or imaginary friends, us womanfolk gather in huge circles and reminisce about the children we've killed. Sometimes our eyes are rivers or clear stone and blood vessel. Every now and then we fall to our knees and bang our heads on the floor to wail the empty out.

It is among this circle we all admit or are convinced that we be single handed murderers, ignoring the union needed to create children/ignoring the societal hammer chopping the cracked wood beneath our feet. It is in this vain that each testament is collected. There are roots to this plant (abortion), and they are hidden in the unnamed burials.

Let me borrow your spine

A lot of women were sitting by themselves or some with the girlfriends. You can always tell the ones getting it done because they have this blank stare. That room was sad, nobody was really talking or laughing. This one particular lady stood out to me because she was sitting alone reading a magazine. When they called her name she took that walk by herself. (gwendolyn)

As i sat waiting what bothered me the most was the energy surges. Every 10 minutes the lights would flicker and you would hear a strong humming . You knew what it was, and all you could do if you were me, and had a mother to go home to, is know that you would be next and no matter what you had better come out empty. Really, children cannot fight for the babies inside of them, so i lay there wide-eyed and awake. (malene)

What i have come to realize is that nothing is as it seems. Reason and logic are more terms of entertainment when one has not been afforded the luxury of freedom. Women who live in poverty, middle class women who succumb to a strenuous work ethic non-promotive of children are more likely to abort a child, continuing to be pregnant with remnants of guilt, sorrow, emptiness, and excuses. (ayanna)

There are so many kids here that are murdered everyday and nobody cares. They should'nt have been conceived, but that's after the fact. But then what's the difference? They should be killed before they're made. All these babies that are beaten everyday. (anonymous)

It took two days for him to return my page, but once he did i requested to see him immediately. It felt like we stood in that same spot for hours without words. After confirming what he thought was right, i was at a lost for words. Every now and then he would offer what he considered words of comfort - " if you want to keep it i will help you," but black women can never depend on promises, not even from their own mothers. What was i supposed to do? Who was i supposed to be? (johari)

There was a time when i would swallow all that black men had to say. Times i allowed silence to shape my world and color it profane. This day is over and must be/the tongue has to be preserved for children both dead and alive. i am not an incubator or stone unable to think, unaffected by this country's "tolerance" of my color and its raping of my womb and image. i have aborted many things in my life, among them children, some may say for a cause like that of Sethe in Toni Morrison's Beloved. (mattie)

[cont'd on pg.6]

ingredients>>

testament: the day convinced me to be
the pros v.s. the cons of marriage
with a child's heart
nina phire august:
an excerpt from andria cole's new collection
folktale
circumcision

editor's note

moving from silence to speech is a revolutionary gesture.
bell hooks

Early one Sunday morning, my daughter and I went to feed the geese at the reservoir. It was one of those days where everything seemed to illuminate. We sat for hours on the grass, laughing, dancing, and shewing the ducks. Nearby were a father and daughter pair, who too were laughing, playing, and shewing away the hungry ducks, except they were videotaping each moment. With video camera in hand, the daughter handed a goose feather to her father who placed the feather in his hair and began to pretend to be an "Indian". His face turned gruesome, a falsetto angry. He began bobbing up and down, yelling *quite savagely*. Damn, I thought, is that who the Indians were/are to him? Is this the legacy that he will pass on to his daughters? That Indians are people with feathers in their head, who walk the earth, angry to no end...

Of the many ideas that raced through my head, one stood out. It reminded me of the importance of keeping your own record, your own legacy and voice. It reminded me of the importance of speech and documenting the truths in each lifetime.

When you set out to create something, you question your relevance at almost every step, but always the Creator, the Ancestors, Spirts or Flowers give you that extra push. To this we say Ashe!

So that brings us to the delicate theme detailed in the pages in front of you. I must say this has been the hardest issue yet and it's only our second! This issue, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, is about resistance. It is about acknowledging and overcoming in order to bring change. The articles, poetry, and visuals in this *edition speak in this light.*

We've brought something new and exciting to the forefront. Dialogue is essential to change, and at all costs, avoided among black women. Shug's purpose is to begin to mend this. We've assembled a mini-forum on marriage. Authors Andria Nacina Cole and Lisa Jefferson-Williams speak eloquently on marriage's pros and cons. Also in this issue, we peek into Cole's upcoming novel, *Nina Phire August*, which delves into the pain of life and the joy of resurrection.

Standing hand in hand with the vision of Shug, **testament** is a constant to Shug's pages. Each testament features narratives and voices of women of all ages and dialects. *The day convinced me to be* is a testament that gives voice to abortion.

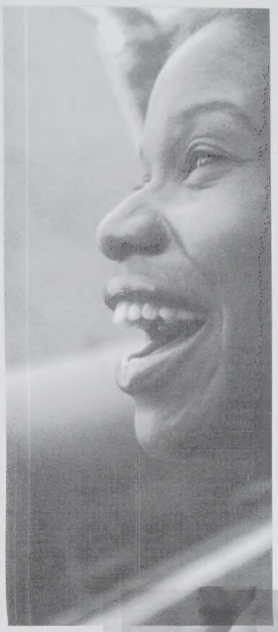
In addition to political perspectives, Shug presents **With a child's heart**. Its aim is to give voice to our young adolescent and teenage girls. This month's featured artist is 12 year old poetess Joy Williams who reflects on isolation's dualism.

With a griot's power to unveil the beautiful in colored people, visual artist Yemonya Smalls paints from the heart of rebirth, a symmetry of culture and love. Sherry Insley offers the perfect fit, capturing the untouchable feminine sexuality, suppressed and bonded through the tradition of female circumcision.

Overall there is a hell of a lot to be said, and one hell of a legacy to record and scream. May you join us in our madness or sanity and may we speak of these things in circles, so that our voice surrounds those holding their ears/those making fun of us womanfolk.

Malene Bell

Shug notes



I read Shug from cover to cover on Monday. The newsletter is wonderful. I have not read a lot of "women material," but I know that Shug is not the typical, superficial magazine or newsletter. The articles presented in Shug introduce a range of subjects and themes that women of African decent can relate to. The poetry, art, and over all theme gives the newsletter a well-received cultural nuance... Sistas with a vision using their creative genius. That's some good shit.

Joe C.

I appreciated the candor and multidimensionality shown in the pieces I read. Often, as busy women of the new millennium, our senses become dulled to just how much beauty there is in diversity of thought. Your magazine took me to that place where I felt that sunlight. I applaud you for daring to be beautiful and intelligent, as we are so often made to feel we must be one or the other. Let me encourage you to resonate your voice in Shug as loudly as you can because in our communities and throughout the world, it needs to be heard. I look forward to the next issue.

L.J.W

Dear Visionaries
Your voices, images, imposing facts, and deliciously cathartic reflections have touched me deeply. My heart, a woman's heart, coursing with life-blood and broken feelings - full-bodied and deliriously powerful were rippled and are shivering with the poignant song of this publication. The exploration of the political and social happenings around the world partnered with the smart, scathing words of women-touched with the Goddess is a miracle, birth, and joy to behold. In honor of this wonderful moment, I offer you a few words:

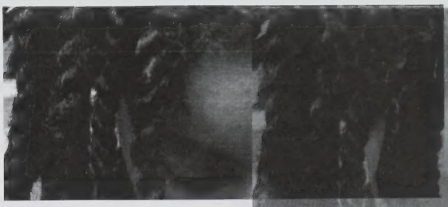
I imagine the womb
to be like being
between the sheets of a bed
sliding about fretfully
stretching out your legs
straining for a spot of cool Air

Underneath layers and layers of
sheets
linens
membranes
tissue
and blankets
being painfully aware
of the burning light
that resides on the other side
but only buzzing through milky
into the drowsy halcyon
of your tomb
your womb

And to have quilts atop you
threads holding geometry
of womenfolk
memory protecting you
enveloping you
you that are not on the side that can
percieve literal projections
of this wrought homage
to community
family
fraught
taught begotten...

M. Shickley

Speakin yo' mind



pros of marriage

The topic implies that there is some debate regarding the worthiness of the marriage relationship. Notice I choose to describe marriage as a relationship NOT as the institution it is so often referred to in popular culture. I think this distinction in language illuminates the ludicrous nature of the debate. Would you argue the necessity of friendship? Family? Sisterhood or brotherhood? I don't think so. But the necessity of marriage is a hot topic on the lips of 20 and 30 somethings today and of interesting but not surprising note, it often gets the blues. Having said this, I will tell you some things about myself, that may help you understand my stance.

I am 28 years old and have been happily married for one year, but have been in a happy marriage relationship for three and a half years. Marriage, sisters and brothers, has gotten and continues to get a bad rap because we get our ideas from television. You don't want to admit that any medium influences you that much, but consider how many times you have thought about how a husband is supposed to act? What the duties of a wife are supposed to be? Sure some of us are fortunate to have been products of happily married families, but statistics on divorce speak to how infrequent this occurrence is. When we go into relationships with preconceived notions and a whole lot of "shoulds," we end up like those assholes on Divorce Court with a sob story and a broken heart.

Now, what have I learned about how to have a happy marriage relationship? Well, here are my pearls. Know you, what you can live with, what you can live without. Because contrary to popular fantasy, nobody gets it all!

Love, yes sweet love is only part of the equation. Women and men who don't consider things like character, drive, ambition, integrity, congruency, and yes damnit, earning potential, are playing themselves.

Sisters, forget those people who look at you sideways for asking financial questions, because money can be a source of major stress in a relationship when it ain't right.

There is nothing greater than two people coming together to achieve common goals. My husband and I not only do the small stuff together like eat, shop, and travel, but we dream together. He has my back and I have his. He is my biggest cheerleader and I am his. There is no shame in that. Don't try to persuade me that the "modern" woman does not want that!

The only thing you can count on is that things will change. Give the other person room to grow, but be committed to growing together. Marriage is not your license to let yourself go (in mind, body, or spirit). It can be your window to limitless self actualization. Be merciful and forgive mistakes and shortcomings.

Marriage legally protects you. If it takes a ceremony to make you married, then you have a relationship problem.

When two people commit to each other, they are married in every way that counts. In the world we live in, it would be irresponsible not to consider our family and their protection. So what are the pros of marriage? Well assuming you have two like minded individuals, who understand work done in love and family building, and who realize that marriage does not end your individuality, but adds the dimension of togetherness, the pros rest in the creation and the strong establishment of family. As family is a major element of the revival and survival of the African American community, who could argue that marriage isn't beautiful when entered for the right reasons?

lisa jefferson-williams

marriage?

cons of marriage

The term marriage is truly relative since if you live in India and are lowly woman, it translates at best, to misogyny:

[A woman] should do nothing independently even in her own house. In childhood subject to her father, in youth to her husband, and when her husband is dead to her sons, she should never enjoy independence.

-Hindu law code

And undoubtedly, the above quote pampers, if not evades the issue. Practices such as sati (widows thrown on funeral pyres alive) and bride burning (new brides burned to death by in-laws for failure to meet the demands of a dowry) are not at all unknown or widely condemned and are for many an inevitable function of the normal course of marriage.

Perhaps though, out of fairness, we should use the lives of Saudi women as further indication of marriage's capacity. Polygamy – easily one of sexism's most blatant institutions, runs wild throughout Saudi Arabia. At its hands, the women cannot marry outside Islam or divorce without just cause ("just," we imagine, is nothing short of attempted murder). Saudi marriage is ultimately no more than a membership, one never ending, to a goddamned harem.

And what of Kenyan and Nigerian women, who along with much of the continent's feminine population in accordance with traditional/unspoken law, are not suitable for marriage without first experiencing genital mutilation? Mistakenly given the deluded title, circumcision, the inhuman custom can mean infibulation or the removal of the entire external genitalia followed immediately by the sewing together of the vulva's remains. The practice (we can agree on the inadequacy of this word) is performed on girlchildren aged seven days to fourteen years and is simultaneously an act of force and compassion; for the uncircumcised woman is treated easily as a leper and in some cultures spends her life shamefully single. Today, 6000 girlchildren will be genitally mutilated/to date 130 million women worldwide have experienced and will forever wear the limp of its' razor. And to this, we take vows.

Of feigned concern these days, is the Afghan woman, who like the rest of womankind is subject to marriage but uniquely bears the weight of the thick burqua. She faces daily the threat of being stoned to death for the hint of an ankle or an elbow shown (such would shame the union with her husband). The windows of her house are painted black so that no man aside from her husband may see her face/her movement. She cannot hold her children or walk with any agility, else die for thinking she might.

To the left somewhere, is the American woman, clad in her bulky, laced gown with a ring soaked in the blood of Africans. She too is held captive at marriage's hand. For in it, she is cheated on and raped at leisure. She does not remember herself since her husband drops and picks her up from work (if she does not spend her days lost in their children) and eats each meal in his face. Often, she forgets to masturbate in name of his penis bent awkward at her ass each evening. She has been trained, as every other woman in the world, to fight the sexual urges bouncing between her thighs/to save and tone them down for one single man named husband. Whether she knows it or not, she is the Indian woman, the Saudi woman, the Nigerian woman, the Afghan woman. What differs is only the length of the leash – she can run miles before being jerked and strangled/left like meat to bake in the sun.

I have written the above Americanly so, still relatively young and from the womanist's perspective. I am sure there are a handful of women who may exclude themselves from the above, but it doesn't matter, a few healthy marriages, if millions lay breathless beside it. I am safe from the wrath of marriage since I am disinterested and unafraid of the effectiveness of my fingers. But of the ugly, loose-hipped woman approaching 40, still with no man desperate to keep her, who will comfort those sobs she so consistently gives each evening? Sexism works its evil even here, where marriage serves as one of the key definitions of woman – motherhood, the other.

We are American enough to pretend marriage is lovely/ the formal expression of a love long in weight. We must be woman enough to call it what it really is – bullshit.

andria nacina cole

Crit

Willie returned today, to rape and murder Shirley. There were light nicks at her shoulders and at the backs of her thighs/the gashes on her buttocks were much deeper. At the base of her back was a hole I wished to run and place my mouth over. I wonder what more can happen. To me. To us.

He sat there, with her body, drinking coffee and smoking the pipe she and I used to smoke the reefer Sasha brings me each weekend. I wanted to snatch it from his lips but was afraid. He was completely naked except for the dirty black work boots resting at his ankles.

He said, "Go on bitch...less you wanta end how she did."

For a moment I thought, *fine*. But I remembered my child and her children - especially the youngest. I turned and ran.

I told Chief Weiner that my lover had been murdered. He asked where *he* was and I blushed.

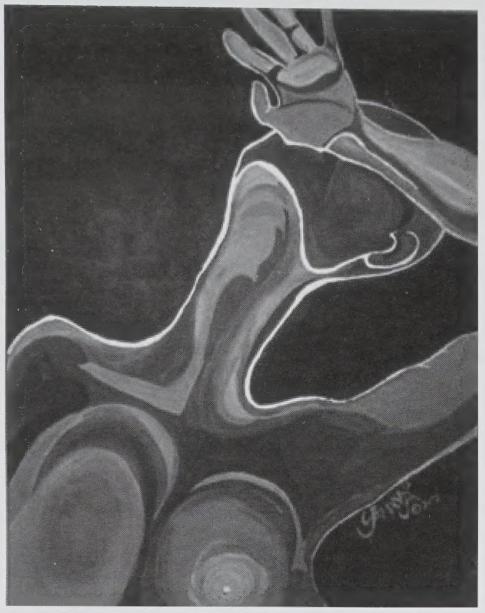
"She is in the house on Levagrant Lane. The one that Mr. and Mrs. Dredd rent out. Her husband, he came from Georgia and murdered her." I surprised myself with this emphasis.

"And this is your lover? This married woman?"

"Yes."

He was quiet, as were the other people in the station.

"Please Chief Weiner, right this moment, this man is waiting there with Shirley. She's laid naked beside him. There's blood and a large slit in her back."



He told me he did not agree with such a thing, two women loving each other in that way, but what was right was right and he could not just sit and let a woman be murdered. I followed closely behind them to the house. I had begun to cry and the tears clouded my sight so much that I ran up on a curb and my hubcap rolled away. I do not want it or a new one. I do not want to drive ever again. I tried to follow the officers into her house but they told me to remain and I sat nervous in my car's passenger side. Her children would be home soon and I wanted so much for them to hurry and carry her from there...to take that man behind the house and shoot him plainly...who would tell if they did this?

They were in the house for only a short while before one small, pale-faced officer came rushing out with a turned face. I imagined that our faces must've been similar, that we looked just the same - dumb with fear. There was no Willie to accompany so I imagined a few things - that he had killed himself, that he had run, that he was there fucking her corpse. The two latter seemed the most logical and to this, I cried much harder. Before the young officer finished pushing his stomach through, an ambulance sped onto the house's lawn. What happened after, I am unsure. To this scene, I fainted.

Shirley

"Bitch. Bitch! Loudmouth bucktooth bitch. Ya ugly bitch. Bitch you smell like pussy. Wanna leave me, bitch? Huh? You wanna leave da muthafucka don fed yo fat ass fo tweny years? Huh bitch? Don't say shit bitch. Say somethin' and Ima stick my thing right down yo fat thoat. Ya want that though, right? You always liked that shit. Wan somebody to force yo ugly ass. Can't never give it like you sposed to. Bitch I ain't never had to beg fo no pussy. You thought I was gon start wit yo ugly ass? Beg fo some fat stink pussy? Hell naw bitch. Yo jaws was so loose you could fit me and somebody else thing in there. Only thing yo mouf good for is things. I married you though. I shoulda never married yo ugly ass. Shut up! Dirty bitch. Low down, dirty bitch. I hate you. Stink bitch. Shut up! Ima stick my thing in yo loose ass before I kill you if you don't shut up. Bitch! Stink bitch. Ugly stink bitch. You the ugliest bitch I ever seen."

All I was thinkin' was, Lord, please don't let my babies walk in here and see this. Hurry, Willie, kill me. This is what I sang in my head. If it were any other day, my children would have been at the house at two o'clock sharp. At three, when they was nowhere to be found, I started to worry that he had murdered them. I asked Willie if he seen the kids.

"Hell naw bitch, I ain't seen my kids. Remember, yo fat ass took em from me? I ain't seen my kids. How Ima seen my kids and some ugly bitch done took em? You'sa stupid bitch. And don't say shit else. I'm tired of yo voice. It sound like death"

I took long breaths after that. Thank you God, you are a loving man, I thought. Through the rape, I could get. The memories, I took them just fine, cuz I thought of my beautiful babies safe! Runnin' late somewhere.

Then I prayed for another thing - before I closed my eyes, I warned God that maybe I was being greedy, but he understood, didn't he? Could he please give this man the strength to murder himself after he murdered me? And one more thing - could he send Crit so my children wouldn't see me naked and bloody like this?

Willie ripped my clothes off with the same knife he cut me a many times with. When I saw it, I ain't jump. I'm used to its feel. I can stomach it. It don't even cut that deep. In my stomach it went - *bitch, its so you can't have no more babies*! (Willie is such a dumb fuck - I stopped with my periods three years before I left him). And into my tongue - *hold your mouth still, I want to open that hole back up!* (Once he kicked me in the chin so hard, it took a chunk out). Cross my breasts and between my thighs - that ole' sick fuck really liked that, he was slobbin' down his face/had no control. That look was bout worse as the rape.

After all this, he decided he was good and ready to have his thing sucked. With a bloody mouth, I did what he said (I thought me and Crit could laugh about that later and then I thought there wudn't be no later and I also thought Crit wudn't find it funny as me since she square and all). *What you doin'? I can't cum like that...bitch get on yo hands.* In a million positions he jabbed at me with his tiny thing. All I could think was how much more width Crit's fingers had. When he finished all he had to do, he stabbed me clear in the back. That one shook me, I fell to the floor and lost track of my breath.

Just when my forehead hit the wood, I felt petite hands on the hump at my shoulders.

Right now, right now, I'm going to sing to you. What would you like to hear? How's the blues? I'm sorry Shirley, but that is all I seem to know.

And this woman sang some song to me. Some song 'bout trees and love and what its like not to have it. What its like to sit and wait on it and wait so long you die. It was parts in the song 'bout children and them stoppin' gettin' love as soon as they ole' enough to walk - specially the boys. And on that part, I start thinkin' bout my boy Junior and how if he'd cry back in Georgia, everybody'd jump on him and call 'im sissy. From his daddy to Mark at the barber shop to me, even. He wudn't never 'lowed to feel nuthin' but violent things and angry things. Never 'lowed to be a child. And even my girls had too fast to grow up - had to start coverin' everything up fo' they even had a thing. If the strap off they tank tops' start to fall past they shoulder, somebody there to remind 'em how fast they gettin'. How you fast when all you got is a hint a nipple is all I ever wanted to know. And then the song went on about love missin' from the air and the earth - it wudn't no song I ever heard, but it was 'bout beautiful as they come.

In between the song, I heard Crit walk to face Willie and him promise her death if she ain't leave. I heard her run. The woman kept singing her song. Seemed like to me that she started it over. She laid on top me. I heard Willie faint over her breaths - *Stink bitch...I hate you...you need to die...who need you round here? Them kids don't need no mother like you.* He moved from the chair and returned. I heard a shot and felt lumps like jelly on my feet. The woman got off me.

My name is Louisa, she said. *I need you to make love with Crit this evening. I'm sorry, Shirley...as soon as you're well. I need you to kiss each spot of her back so that the heaviness may fall. I need for you, after kissing her back, to lick where you imagine her womb would be, so that she knows life can still sustain there. Kiss her, Shirley, in the deepest cut between her thighs - tell her the folds belong to her and that as long as she remembers, possession will never leave. Kiss her Shirley, before she forgets one morning, to breathe.*

"Yes ma'am," I said. "Yes ma'am".

"God", I said, "you are a loving woman".

nina phire august

[cont'd from pg 4.]

At the hospital, I ain't say a word. Crit babbled and drowned my forehead in her days ole' spit (I almost spoke about that). She said sorry for leavin'. Said she shoulda popped Willie in his teeth and picked me up and ran. How was you gonna do that? I wanted to ask. You only bout a buck tweny! The first things I wanted to say to her though was intimate. I wanted first, to tell her of Louisa savin' me.

Why don't you speak to me? She said real serious. I looked at her and she excused my quiet by sayin' it must be somethin' almost killed people do. I held each of my children for hours and corn rowed each of their heads - I put love in every braid.

They only kept me the day. Stitched me up and sent me the hell home. I went to Criit's with the children. Her and Sasha cooked somethin' confusin'. I think they was very busy tryin' to please me and confusin' is what came out. I ate it though, and so did everybody else. It wudn't terrible, but ain't nobody get up to get a thing else. I'll cook soon. I shoulda cooked then, but I liked how everybody was actin'. Maybe I should get almost killed more often.

I saved everything for Crit.

First, she pretended to clean the room. This was a dumb thing to do - first, becuz it was clean. Second cuz we are us. She was uncomfortable with herself. She wanted to save me like in the movies. To run outback and get the shotgun from the shed and blow that muthafucka's head off. She saved me the wise way and this way ain't the most glamorous. I would tell her that later though.

"Louisa asked me to talk to you." I finally said and she stopped movin'. "She said I should kiss your back/kiss it 'til all the pain fall away. Then I'm to kiss your belly and remind you of the life there. She want me, and this is the most important, to kiss between you and us to sing bout how it's yours." Crit wudn't movin'. "That's what I'm gonna do, Crit...she saved me so that I could do those things."

She fell to the floor. Right to her knees. I moved real slow to get her. I was scared that the holes was still open somehow and the blood would run from me. I finally got her and put her on the bed. I ain't hurt in no place.

I undressed her and then me.

We sat buck naked next to each other. She stared in the air and I stared right wit her. I was tryin' very hard to see what she saw. I wished Louisa would come to sing to me or to give me some advice about what it was Crit was doin'. I thought when I told her what I was 'posed to do, she would just fall to the bed wit a big smile or somethin'. Well, I guess I really ain't expect that. But I prayed for it.

For the night, I kissed where I was told, wit what feelin' I imagined went wit 'em.

And when I finished, we sang what it all meant.

She screamed and I cried. It went back and forth like this for a long while.

At break, when the sun was on its way, I asked, "Who is Louisa?"

"My mother," she said "Louisa is my mother."

To this, I sat quiet. I ain't know what to say 'bout murdered mothers comin' back to speak.

andria nacina cole

Joy is simply the fruit of balance. When small steps are taken to orchestate a balanced, fluid life, joy is simply the result. Overcoming hurdles or devising creative solutions to challenges is the water which nourishes seeds. It is the sacrifice we make in exchange for happiness, and our contribution to the book of lessons that is life. If we attempt to find the light in struggle, and the lessons in pain or difficulty, then no experience is fruitless. Extracting wisdom and higher consciousness from all of the fruits borne from all of our experiences, and accepting that all of the fruits borne from experience are needed to nourish us, is the secret to joy. (Mari, 27)

book list

Bone Black
Memories of Girlhood
by bell hooks

By the Light of My Father's Smile
by Alice Walker

Anthem: for colored women only
by Andria Cole

The Collected Poems of Audre Lourde
by Audre Lourde

Joy is that hard ass laughter between girlfriends, like the laughter that is circular and consumes the spirit and creates a symphony of sound. (Seneca, 32)

finding a quiet place with a book and a glass of wine (Lisa, 28)

poetry

kim riley

for women of col-our

for a moment
I want to find
what is good in me
magnify it one million times
maybe then
I'll remember my worth

telisa,

if you have ever known
the search for joy
you know me
there is sameness
in our experience
bloodwater for the Earth
sometimes forgetting to breathe our mother tongue

brown boys

i see revolution
tattooed in your eyes
give me the dreams
that grow in your roots
I'll bury them
deep inside the Earth
they'll be waiting for you
when you realize american dreams are not enough

love

true love
is swallowing a fragrance
distinctly yours
and holding your smile
all the while dancing to tones
of your laughter
pausing only to breathe
your touch
and walkaway

testament (cont'd from pg 1.)

It's a scar. When people talk about it, i feel like disappearing. i feel like falling out of the sky or something. (anonymous)

i've seen women bent over, dying from homemade abortions. The lye/ bleach/hangers and pens would leave so many sterile. As i speak, i realize that we always talked of how insane it was, we never questioned what would bring a woman to her knees like that. (anonymous)

i always wonder if i made the right decision. i see that picture of that child moving around, and i feel like damn, i committed murder, but then i was so young, what did i know about being a mother? (gwendolyn)

i am reminded of a conversation about the purpose of women. i am reminded of a conversation i was to be intrigued by where upon i was the moon, and man the sun, that i was the fruit and the girth, and he a mere observer. What we must question in the role of birth, what we must undo is a myth perpetuated in our daily speech, that women are put here with the purpose of maintaining all life. i've always wondered why it is so easy for men to walk away from children leaving them longing and fatherless. Perhaps they believe one drop of semen unworthy in comparison, perhaps there is envy. No matter how empowering birth may be, it can never be dictated as something we must do, a commandment on mans long list of feminine duties. The ability to give birth is a gift, and it is through choice one uses this gift. It is in Love we wish to conceive. (crystal)

We are the children of the Universe which dictates life and death. The High Being, to me, called God, can be called Buddha, Mohammed, Jehovah, and others is responsible for life and death. Man does not give life, God does. The soul is born so many times before it chooses to stay. It is given freedom to stay or leave the world before it is born. So the feeling you get to terminate a pregnancy is not your feeling, it is the soul's feeling, ready to journey back as soon as possible because it has made up its mind not to come at that time. They do come back when they are ready. So abortion does not mean you had anything to do with it. The passenger inside you was the one in charge. Remember that they do come back, but in many forms, not always as human beings. They can come back as trees, plants, mountains, and rivers, which lets us know that we all are one in the universe. (anonymous)

where are my teeth?
i have placed them like children
in the center of worry.

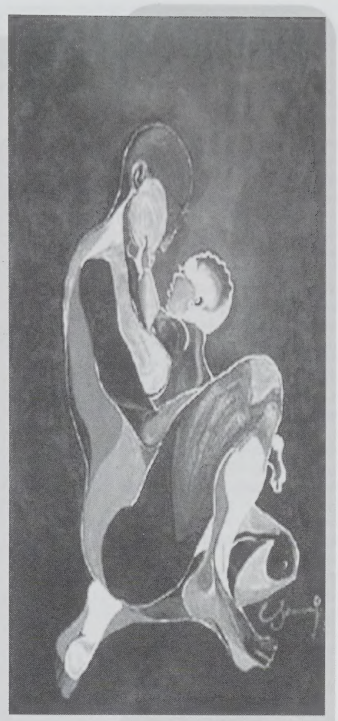
One can only imagine what it is to be trapped inside of one of america's issues, to be seen only in a cyclops-like tunnel with controlled light at the end. Abortion, like so many other issues, has been conveniently labeled and very politely passed off and accepted as woman's burden.

Throughout our lifetime we are offered roles that unveil themselves as rites of passage. It is through the endurance and communion of these rituals in ladydom that allow us the title, woman (mule). By all means, women are cultivated to be wholesome mothers, despite experiences that may prove contrary. On countless occasions i've heard, spoken of, or seen someone shake their head at a woman drug addict for being a bad mother, for disgracing her motherhood, as if immediately motherhood would cure her addiction and the one hundred factors attached to it. There are no timelines or posters for her grief. There is no healing or help offered to her children. No one brings bags of food or offers to bring breakfast. There is only the disgrace of hungry, nappy-headed children cursed with a no good momma. Even our commentary about women in countries plagued with famine centers around questions of motherhood. We question why they are continuously pregnant if there is no food to eat. We question what it must be to have a child crying underneath an empty breast. We question what it is to see children drop to their death like rain. We erase the woman and put motherhood in her place.

Additionally, society strategically labels women independent (free from the influence of, guidance, or control of another or others; self reliant) which is valiantly worn as a symbol of strength. But this is an illusion. Women are most often sufficient. To say that women are independent is to omit the many battles faced on a daily basis. For example, how is the single mother truly independent? Does she have a choice in possessing a job to feed, clothe, and provide shelter for she and her child? And what of the married woman with child? Without economic backing does she have a choice to sleep her morning sickness away, and is her husband supportive of the universe changing inside of her? And what of the poor woman, or the woman who is abused? If suddenly she were with child, would motherhood champion a new renaissance and somehow brush away the condition?

The role of mother was created by *other*. Standards were invented without questioning or acknowledging the woman experience, in the the way that the Constitution was written exclusive of the black voice and experience. Time brings with it change. Without evaluating people and their descisions in accord with timing and condition, one creates roles that are for oppressive means. From birth to girlhood to womanhood, a lineage of disconnection has been created. Our bodies/ourselves are for sacrifice. In motherhood, or when with child, there is an expected etiquette and a degree of separation, that completely ignores the condition and spirit of the woman carrying child. The woman whether poor, rich, black,white, extinct, dying, must uphold the sacred, precious rite of motherhood, else be named a murderer or feminist.

Abortion, the question of life, is really a question of time. When our culture evolves from Eve-ism, and the rationing of freedom, and its facade of being impressed by life and the creators of life, and when women begin to teach each other through each other, then abortion will exist as a caterpillar, to be given wings and fly away.



with
a child's heart:

rogue

the deafening sound against my window
the darkness of my life
the girl without love
the girl without fright

the hollowness
in my heart
the storm clouds
in my eyes
the dryness
of my soul

I walk this Earth alone
shattered glass
with abandoned trash
when will I be
called home?
no companion to call
my own
so I roam

I'm known as rogue
to my people
What people?

my people are dead
gunshots to the head/heroine
cocaine
how could I ever be sane watching
them kill
themselves
I walk the Earth alone.
no people
to call my own.

joy williams

joy will come in the morning light, you got to hear joy (anonymous)

folktale

The cloth of women
always to be sewn
with needles
for they are small enough
to pinch
rather than bite
your head off.

The recent events plaguing the Catholic Church are as old as its roots. Taunt priest molesting young boys into cathartic submission. Commentators, theorists, and other ordinary sexists declare to put a stop to it. Birthed from this controversy, is the consideration to disembowel the immaculate conception. The question now being considered in retrospect is, "Should priests be married?" (Although retrospect would imply that no one, including the church pimp/Archdieoces, knew of such behaviors, and had no laws to mandate such occurrences).

The suggestion is pointed at a sect that in celebrating centuries of tradition does not allow women to preach sermons. A sect and followers of a sect which continue to deny women voice. Attempts have been made to revolutionize the priests oath by allowing him to marry.

What has been denied and consequently ignored throughout its debate are the implications of such a question, and its readiness to use women as a scapegoat. Immediately, those advocating the marital union of priests avidly assert that women are not to be used as a cure for pedophilia, although suggesting marriage as a possible solution for the problems facing the church.

To deny a link between timing and cause is to maintain that revolution can exist without revolutionaries, without a condition or phenomenon to arouse, or vice versa. The suggestion is a scrupulous symbol of society's disinterest in the feminine counterparts. For where is the mention of the nun's oath in this argument of contemporary fortitude, of celibacy, its effects on the human condition, the human spirit, the existence of the church? How presumptuous to deny the feminine counterpart, to be a mouthpiece for both parties by advocating one and not questioning another on the world's stage.

More importantly, how does this speak to woman's role in marriage? For the argument implies that sexual frustrations and the unfulfilled state of priesthood has the possibility to be cured with the induction of woman, married. There is a deeper issue here, one perhaps that begins with the illustrious garden of Eden.

Before the Hamitic hypothesis, the cursing of black people with big dumb lips, lowliness and servitude, there was Eve. The woman who cursed the world by perking her surly lips up to savor the fruit of all sin. Un-satisfied. Un-grateful. Dis-obedient. Wo-man, Eve. A name unspoken, yet infamous. There is a striking resemblance between Eve and the way women are treated - always corrected in speech, in gesture, in breath, watched, not trusted, and unworthy (we've yet to see a woman president). Conceptually, women are both the cause and the cure of hopelessness. We are bottled, written and crossed out by people who have never even acknowledged our opinions or facts.

The question then is this, how can any person ask or speak of marriage in the context of which it has been spoken? How can anyone be pro-woman, pro-life, pro-love without knowing or asking women what it is, and how they dream of spending it? How can anyone subscribe to a religion in which women are discarded, their ideas only sufficient in the distinguished role of wifedom. A religion, in which the birth of god (lovemaking, pushing out of child & angel) is not discussed or painted with bright colors in a cave/in which the Mother of God is only a convenient portal named Mary, rather than Creator of God.

Who are you who have wings, but are told not to fly?

Even the flowers would stay rooted, rather than walk.
Even they recognize dirt being thrown in the face.

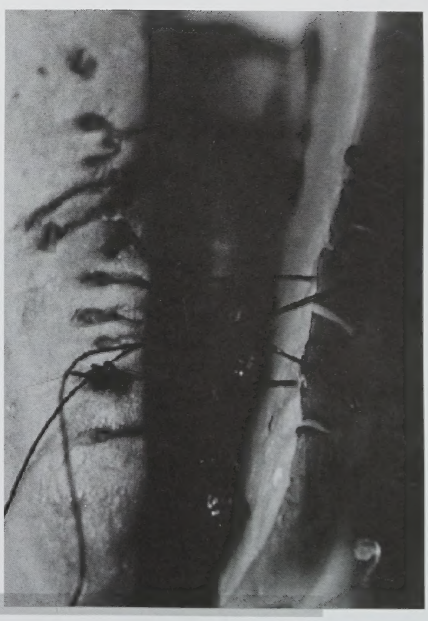
circumcision

Virtuous
is
the girl who suffer
and die
without a sound

-indian proverb

In Somalia, a man the length of suede runs through the street waving a bloody knife in the wind. There is celebration to be sung, for he has just consummated his marriage. He has opened his wife, come in the wound called vagina, and cursed her with the possibility of birth.

Each day the sun decides to rise and fall, 6,000 young girls are mutilated. Understated as female circumcision, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), is tradition in 28 countries in Africa, various parts of the Middle East, and Asia, and is performed on girls as young as seven days new.



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FGM is performed in three different ways. Sunna, an Arabic term for "tradition", is the least deadly of the three procedures and consequently the least performed. This procedure involves the removal of the clitoral prepuce, or hood. The clitoris, itself is spared in this case and left in tact. Excision, is the removal of the entire clitoris, partnered with the labia minora and in some instances the labia majora. Infibulation erases all remnants of the female identity. During infibulation, the entire clitoris is removed with any sharp object - glass, razors, knives, or scissors.

The labia minora and labia majora are both sliced out of existence, and the sides of the wound are then sewn together with thorns, while a matchsize opening is created for urination (which takes 10-15 minutes), menstral flow, and sexual intercourse. Sometimes girls hemorrhage to death, dying in the arms of the mothers who have held them down. Others inch their way back into *womanhood*, their legs braced until the vulva heals. At the peak of this *womanhood*, marriage is assured, for cleanliness and virtue are possessed. In the marriage bed, the scar is re-opened, usually with a knife, a task lasting a span of forty days. For convienence, *honeymoon* centers have been created on the outskirts of town so that when the screaming is over-burdensome, it may be suffocated.

To date one hundred thirty million women worldwide have been mutilated.

joy comes through giving back.
(anonymous)

What might make you joyful today may not make you joyful tommorrow...with my grandchildren, they have brought me so much joy, but when i have to watch them day after day, it's no longer joy. The joy is possessed when they go home.
(Faye, 52)

comments:
SHUG
p.o. box 1401
baltimore, maryland 21203
shugnews@hotmail.com

literary submissions:
c/o Kim Riley
shugnews@hotmail.com

visual submissions:
c/o Vanessa Lopez
shugnews@hotmail.com

Letter to the Sun

Sol,

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Inside myself, beyond even the spirit, I screamed.
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But I didn't speak. Because I never do. And really, it's become habit. I let them walk past with jaundice eyes and slew foots/I let them yell words like *fuck you stupid* to their babies, then ask politely to pass me. Me, strange woman/no relation/not familiar or even smiling.

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If ever I forget to love you or hesitate to fight for your laughter – I want the almost to choke the air from me.
It should be just that way.
I'd like to believe I don't believe in vanity. But abortion is the vainest thing. There are days my knees buckle and my tears are enough to fill bowls.
There are so many more days I watch my convex belly in the mirror and open my mouth to show all its teeth and am happy it is not swollen with flesh.
And vain is me.

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I remember at 8 and 9 and 10 and 11 and all the way really to 18 or so, the capacity to hate my mother.
I am not guilty about this/I know now that much of it was her fault and even more of it not.
I think though, I have figured a way around this. This hating your mother. The key, really, is in the fear. To boil it gone. To make it smoke and without color. The mother must do this.

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On occasion, your first word slips from me/I fight doggishly though to never forget what it was for you to pop your head from between me – it is this moment I defend you so brutally for.
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I can rub the sweet of my thighs all across your father/but the smell will always wash away. He will never be me. You though, have my wet, burgundy blood all along the inside. You will never not.
If ever I must choose – you, I will lock at my hip and everyone else must fall away.
Last is no more important than the rest, but it is my favorite.
There is be.
I promise to let you breathe off the beat if you like. Out and in, if you please.
I promise never to remind you of some place you'd fit better.
I promise you what little freedom I can offer.
The rest, you'll have to gear up and fight for alongside me.

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On a day, probably one with rain or thick clouds while resting or in the bath,you will discover your V. You will roll on its hood and tiny ants will march along your back. You will first orgasm with yourself. Paint a picture of this and carry it like beads at your neck. If you look closely, you'll see a necklace of similar hang at my own and at every woman's – even those afraid to admit.

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Woman's Voice. Woman's Experience.

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Shug rejects the contemporary view of women and denounces the outrageously caricatured faces of women plastered on the ends of shoelaces, and other places in which light can be hidden. The Art-icles in Shug are engaged in battle with the constant defacement of women and the myths professed about women. Each issue will explore local, national, or international political happenings.

ingredients>>

testament: the day convinced me to be

the pros v.s. the cons of

marriage

with a child's heart

nina phire august:

an excerpt from andria cole's new collection

folktale

circumcision

Let me borrow your spine

A lot of women were sitting by themselves or some with the girlfriends. You can always tell the ones getting it done because they have this blank stare. That room was sad, nobody was really talking or laughing. This one particular lady stood out to me because she was sitting alone reading a magazine. When they called her name she took that walk by herself. (gwendolyn)

As i sat waiting what bothered me the most was the energy surges. Every 10 minutes the lights would flicker and you would hear a strong humming . You knew what it was, and all you could do if you were me, and had a mother to go home to, is know that you would be next and no matter what you had better come out empty. Really, children cannot fight for the babies inside of them, so i lay there wide-eyed and awake. (malene)

What i have come to realize is that nothing is as it seems. Reason and logic are more terms of entertainment when one has not been afforded the luxury of freedom. Women who live in poverty, middle class women who succumb to a strenuous work ethic non-promotive of children are more likely to abort a child, continuing to be pregnant with remnants of guilt, sorrow, emptiness, and excuses. (ayanna)

There are so many kids here that are murdered everyday and nobody cares. They should'nt have been conceived, but that's after the fact. But then what's the difference? They should be killed before they're made. All these babies that are beaten everyday. (anonymous)

It took two days for him to return my page, but once he did i requested to see him immediately. It felt like we stood in that same spot for hours without words. After confirming what he thought was right, i was at a lost for words. Every now and then he would offer what he considered words of comfort - " if you want to keep it i will help you," but black women can never depend on promises, not even from their own mothers. What was i supposed to do? Who was i supposed to be? (johari)

There was a time when i would swallow all that black men had to say. Times i allowed silence to shape my world and color it profane. This day is over and must be/the tongue has to be preserved for children both dead and alive. i am not an incubator or stone unable to think, unaffected by this country's "tolerance" of my color and its raping of my womb and image. i have aborted many things in my life, among them children, some may say for a cause like that of Sethe in Toni Morrison's Beloved. (mattie)

[cont'd on pg.6]